

VILLAGE OF SHERIDAN

Village Hall

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ENVIRONMENTAL COMMENTS

TO: David Navecky
Surface Transportation Board
395 E. Street SW
Washington, DC 20423-0001

RE: Docket No. FD 35952
Environmental Scoping Comments to Great Lakes Basin Transportation proposal

The Village of Sheridan by approval of its Village Board tenders this letter suggesting the need to identify a number of environmental issues relevant to the proposed rail line.

Background:

The Village of Sheridan is an Illinois municipality located approximately 60 miles southwest of Chicago, Illinois in Mission Township, LaSalle County, Illinois. The Village is bounded on the north and west by the Fox River and is a short distance north of Mission Creek which flows into the Fox River. The Village has a population of approximately 3,000 people of which about 2,000 are residents of the Sheridan Correction center, a State of Illinois prison. While the prison has a deep drilled water well and water tower, the remainder of the Village receives water from shallow wells drilled into aquifer found in the extensive shallow sand and gravel deposits located in the Sheridan area. The Sheridan area is rural in nature with core governmental and emergency services provided by only a few full time employees assisted significantly by part time employees and volunteers. The proposed rail line will be located near the south end of the Village likely between the prison and a bulk fuel facility.

Safety Issues

-Response Time to Hazardous Materials Release

The Village and the Sheridan Community Fire Protection District are not equipped to handle any significant rail disaster involving a release of hazardous materials. While the Sheridan Community Fire Protection District networks with other area fire and ambulance services through a mutual aid call box system, there is no local hazardous materials response team. Contamination of the Fox River, Mission Creek and/or shallow sand gravel aquifer used for area drinking water would have far reaching environmental impacts.

-Prison Evacuation

Any derailment in the vicinity of the State Prison with a corresponding need to evacuate the prison population would be catastrophic. The prison population outnumbers the local residential population and the ability to promptly evacuate the prison does not exist.

-Bulk Fuel Plant Operations

The proposed railway appears to be in close proximity to a fuel bulk plant which includes propane storage near the south border of the Village off County Highway 3. Such fuel plant was intentionally located in a rural area to avoid risks. Locating a high speed rail facility near the fuel plant would significantly increase risks associated with bulk fuel storage.

-Emergency Response Times

The LaSalle County Engineer acting as the advisor to local road authorities has suggested that many rural roads which intersect with the proposed railway will likely be closed near the railway and will not cross the railway. The Sheridan Community Fire Protection District provides emergency ambulance service for significant territory west of the proposed railway requiring the crossing of the proposed railroad. Train traffic and local road closing will likely cause significant delayed response time for already slow rural emergency services.

Land Use Issues

-Loss of farm ground

The land use plans of LaSalle County and the Village of Sheridan are designed to protect valuable natural which includes high quality farm ground. Taking such a wide and large corridor of land for rail related purposes will permanently take from production many acres of prime agricultural land.

-Infringement on Natural Areas

The Village of Sheridan is nicknamed "The Gateway to the Lower Fox River Dells." Local tourism includes Silverleaf Resort (a time share facility located along the Fox River), Sky Dive Chicago (a skydiving and campground facility located along the Fox River), and 3 campgrounds near Sheridan located off the Fox River: Sheridan Rod and Gun Club, Rolling Oaks Campground, and Mallard Bend Campground. Such facilities and several canoe outfitters facilitate public use of a popular scenic paddle boat corridor down the scenic Fox River Dells. The proposed railway will directly overpass and disrupt this scenic natural river area be a major distraction to this valuable paddling corridor.

-Transportation System

LaSalle County has extensive existing transportation corridors which include the navigable Illinois River, several existing rail lines used to support the local silica sand mining industry, and two Interstate highways being I80 and I39. Good land use and environmental planning would suggest the proposed railway be located within or near one or more of the existing transportation systems. Instead of coordinating with existing transportation systems, the proposed railway is boldly seeking an entirely new path taking valuable undisturbed land and causing significant disruption to the local road system.

Conclusion

The Village of Sheridan requests that the foregoing be identified as environmental concerns that that any new rail facility be located adjacent to one of the existing extensive transportation networks in LaSalle County without the need of taking prime farm ground, without disturbing local roads and emergency services and without disturbing a thriving camping and paddle boat tourism destination along the lower Fox River Dells.

Dated this May 9, 2016.

Village of Sheridan

by Michael D. Anderson
Village President

ATTEST

by Cathy Carpenter
Village Clerk

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